

Winter 2005
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FROM THE DESK OF THE DDSN MEDICAL CONSULTANT

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:



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It is now December, getting cold and it is the season for get-together activities. It is also the time of year when we are in close contact and it is easy to spread respiratory illnesses like colds and influenza (flu). This year we have heard a lot about the flu. For information about influenza, please read the November 2002 [Influenza](#) newsletter. This gives the background but this year we have had anxieties about vaccine supply and the "bird flu".

Vaccine supply is now catching up and if you or the consumers you care for are in an at risk group and you have not yet had your shot, please see your health team and get one. The virus changes a little all the time and each year the vaccine is changed so that it can help us fight off the virus that is expected in that season.



We are also hearing about the possibility of a pandemic flu where the flu virus changes so much that we would all be meeting a new virus and not have any past immunity to help. In the past this happened in 1918, 1957, and 1968 and caused serious human health problems in 1918 and not so serious problems in 1957. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention is watching the changes in flu viruses all the time and at the present is especially watching a new form of flu in birds. They are checking to see if changes to a form that could spread in humans. There are many ways that this can be managed but the most important ways to help are the same ones we use for all respiratory droplet infections.

The influenza virus (and the viruses that cause the common cold) spreads in the droplets from the nose, throat, mouth, and lungs of a person who is infected with the virus. These droplets can be released by coughing, sneezing, or spitting. The most common way for these drops full of virus to get into the next person is on their hands.

The droplets can also be breathed in if we are close to the person and they cough or sneeze and do not capture the spray in a tissue (and dispose of the tissue properly). This information is important no matter what flu virus we are dealing with.

For every flu or cold virus that is around we need to do the simple things well to protect ourselves and the folks that we care for.

- ✚ ***Wash your hands often.*** The most common way to catch the flu is to touch your own eyes, nose, or mouth with germy hands. **So keep your hands clean and away from your face.**
- ✚ ***Keep your distance when you are sick or if you are around someone else who is sick.***
- ✚ ***Keep it to yourself.*** One gift you can give others is to help prevent other people from catching your flu. We highly recommend that you **stay home** from work, school, and public places when you are sick. **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- ✚ ***Remember*** – you can still spread germs up to 7 days after getting sick. Following these simple steps for up to a week after getting sick will help to reduce the chances of spreading the flu.

Please keep your self as fit as possible with good diet, exercise, and enough sleep. Use these four simple but important ways (along with the annual “flu” shot) to reduce the chance of being infected with the flu virus.

For more information, visit the web site www.cdc.gov/flu

